

Society of St. Andrew

GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS,
FEEDING THE HUNGRY



The Society of St. Andrew was founded in 1979 by a few Methodist ministers in Virginia. They named it after the disciple who brought Jesus the loaves and fishes at the feeding of the 5000. They got together to start a farm with the intention of using the food to feed the hungry. It wasn't long till they realized that 1. farming is hard.. And 2. The problem isn't that we don't have enough food.

The US produces enough food to feed the whole world. The problem is that we're throwing a good chunk of that food away.



Our particular ministry involves fresh fruits and vegetables. We want to improve the quality of nutrition available to our nation's most vulnerable residents. We work with farmers and growers to acquire fresh produce that they consider unmarketable. This is produce that would go to waste, without our intervention. There are many reasons produce might go to waste. Let's take a look at some of them.

These beans are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. They're not fresh.
- B. Nobody likes green beans.
- C. They're the wrong length.
- D. They have botulism spores.

Here are your choices: They are not fresh. Nobody likes green beans. They are the wrong length. They have botulism spores.



Green beans have to be 3-5 inches for grocery stores to sell them. Farmers are very inventive, but they haven't figured out how to force a bean to grow to 3" or how to stop it at 5". So tons, literally tons, of green beans are thrown away daily. They're sent on the conveyor belt right into the bed of a dump truck, hauled to a nearby field, and dumped in a hole. Our farmer is in Crossville, Tennessee. That's the green bean capital of the US. Most of the green beans grown for commercial sale east of the Mississippi River are grown right on the Cumberland Plateau. Some of those unmarketable beans have gone for years to feed livestock nearby, but the volume of waste is far too high for the livestock to consume. We've been working with this farmer since Summer 2011, and he is thrilled to have these gorgeous green beans going to feed hungry people.



This was our first load of green beans from Crossville, on July 23, 2011. We brought an entire dump truck of green beans from Crossville to Knoxville, where about 100 volunteers bagged green beans from this pile 60 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 4 feet high. This was just two hours of throw-aways from the farmer!



These beautiful strawberries are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. Strawberries are too messy.
- B. They have an insect problem.
- C. Somebody dropped them.
- D. The farm closed for the season.

Strawberries are too messy? They have an insect problem? Somebody dropped them? The farm closed for the season?



They closed for the season. U-pick places often close when the season is coming to an end, even when there's still fruit available.

We mobilize volunteers, usually from within the same county, who can go to the field and finish up the harvest. Then we take the produce to a local shelter or soup kitchen, where it can be used or distributed quickly, without waste.

While I have fruit up here, let me tell you about Edible Arrangements— they're the people who make the bouquets out of fruit. Well, when you cut hearts out of a slice of pineapple, there's often plenty of pineapple left over. The edible arrangements in Knoxville donates their scraps, and a local shelter turns it into fruit cup, fruit salad, and smoothies.



These potatoes are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. They're moldy.
- B. They have blemishes.
- C. Bird's Eye changed packaging.
- D. People prefer 5-lb bags.

Are they moldy? Do they have blemishes? Did Bird's Eye change their packaging? Do people prefer smaller bags?

The changed packaging thing DOES happen, but in this case, the potatoes had spots. Not mold or anything that makes them unhealthy or not edible. Just spots.



These potatoes are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. They were delivered to the wrong place.
- B. The flavor is off.
- C. They are last year's potatoes.
- D. They are the wrong shape.

Were they delivered to the wrong place? Is the flavor off? Are they last year's potatoes? Perhaps they are the wrong shape? Sweet potatoes are supposed to be roughly football-shaped. They're supposed to be a certain size. If they're too big, too small, too bumpy... they're headed for the trash.



There's just no way to grow potatoes (or just about anything else) uniformly. These sweet potatoes are considered "B" grade because the shapes and sizes are so varied. Often growers can't find buyers for these 'differently shaped' potatoes, so they give them to the Society of St. Andrew.

My first experience with SoSA was sorting cucumbers. A pick-up truck load of cucumbers was brought to my college, where students bagged them and took them to local feeding agencies. The cucumbers were fine, just too short, too long, or too crooked. Nobody likes a crooked cucumber.



**This corn is headed for
a landfill. What's
wrong with it?**

This corn is headed for a landfill. What's wrong with it?

- A. They were the second and third ears on each stalk.
- B. They have pesticide residue.
- C. The ears are wormy.
- D. They fell off the truck.

They were the second and third ears on the stalk. They have a pesticide residue. The ears are wormy. They fell off the truck.

Second and third ears. I can't even believe this is a thing. But it is. Apparently grocery stores want the "premium" ears, which often means the topmost ear. So the other two get trashed.



When the corn farmer calls us, we send volunteers out to harvest what's left. In summer 2012, we gleaned more than 50,000 ears of corn from fields in Tennessee.



**These tomatoes are headed
for a landfill. What's
wrong with them?**

These tomatoes are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. They weren't refrigerated.
- B. They are misshapen.
- C. They are too ripe.
- D. They are squished.

What do you think? Were they not refrigerated? Is it another case of misshapen, not uniformly sized produce? Are they too ripe, or did they just get squished?

Too ripe.

Often, at the end of the day at the farmers market, there's produce that just won't make it another day in the sun. Farmers don't want to load it back up and haul it home, so it ends up in the trash. The Society of St. Andrew gleans several farmers markets state wide. We take the leftover produce to places that can cook it that evening.



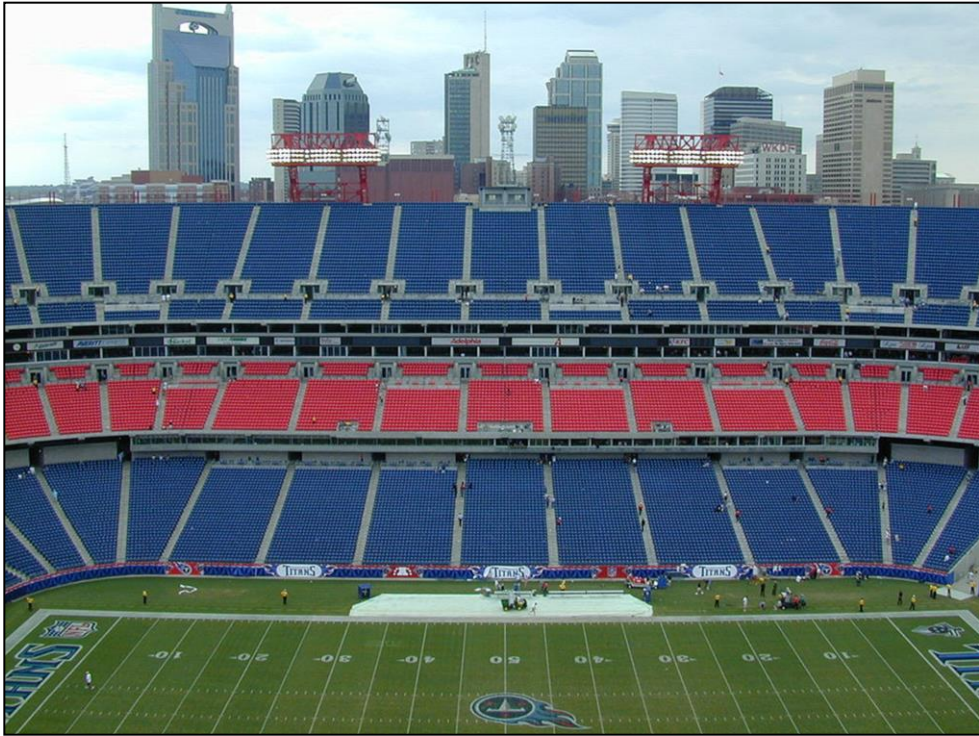
Fresh sauce anyone?



Fresh peaches look so tasty! But these are headed for a landfill. What's wrong with them?

- A. They were overlooked at harvest.
- B. They are bruised.
- C. They didn't get sold.
- D. They are too big.

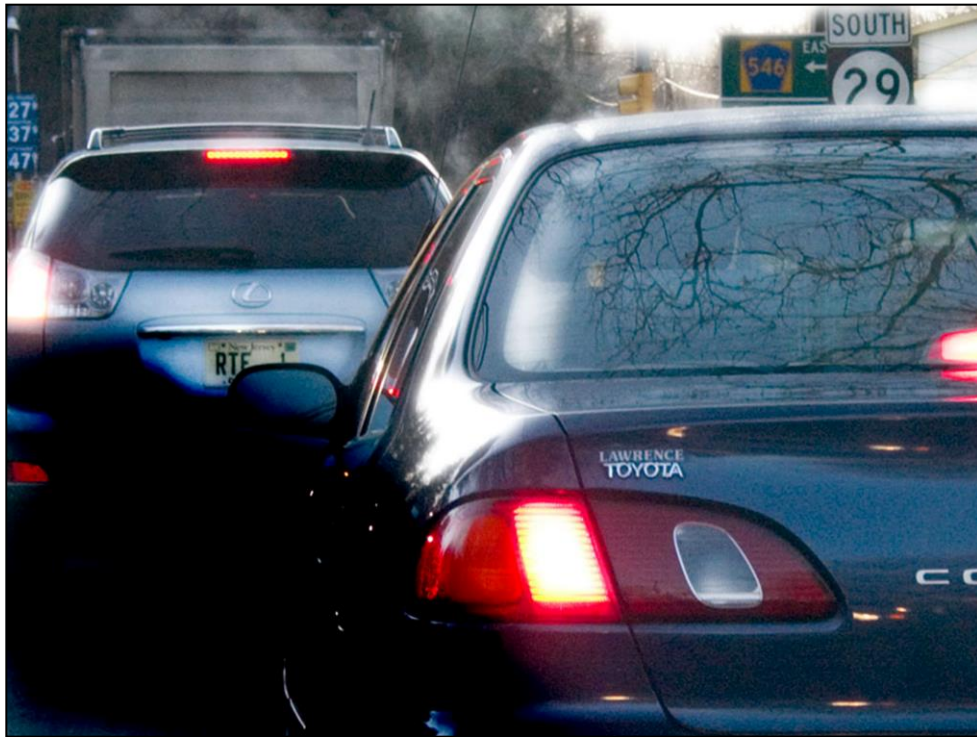
By now, you've got some ideas. Were they overlooked at harvest? Are they bruised? Were they simply left unsold at the end of the farmers' market? Or are they too big? These peaches could go to waste for any of those reasons. But these are too big. Because grocery stores want to know that they are getting the same quality of peaches from growers in California or Texas or South Carolina, the USDA has long-established commodity standards for every fruit and vegetable. They are 4-16 page PDF documents, that you can find on the USDA website. They provide standards for shape, for color, for blemishes, and even for size. Grade A peaches have a $\frac{1}{4}$ " allowable size differential. That's it. Outside that tolerance, you might find them at a farmstand or farmers market, but they won't be in your grocery store – and that means they are likely to go to waste.



The quantity of produce that goes to waste in this country is simply staggering. Jonathan Bloom, author of “American Wasteland”, tells us that the 100 billion pounds of fresh food that goes to waste each year – right here in the US – is enough to fill a professional football stadium from the bottom of the playing field to the top of the stands...EVERY SINGLE DAY.



It's heartbreaking.



Besides filling up landfills, food waste produces methane gas. In fact, food waste is the second-leading cause of methane in the atmosphere. Another way to describe all that: Every ton of fresh produce left to rot in a landfill emits as much greenhouse gas in its decomposition as driving a car for a year.

Other resources wasted

- Water
- Labor
- Fertilizer
- Pesticides
- Funds

1. Depending on the crop, the gallons and gallons of water used to grow it are thrown out with whatever food is tossed.
2. The labor of planting, tending, and harvesting the crops is thrown away with the un-sellable food
3. Fertilizer and pesticides have been used to grow this produce. Varying levels of pollution may be involved with these products, which end up useless if we're throwing so much food away.
4. And of course funds. Farmers spend money on seed, water, labor, fertilizer, and pesticides. When 40% of their crop is un-sellable, that's a big deal.

Meanwhile,
50 million Americans
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their tables.

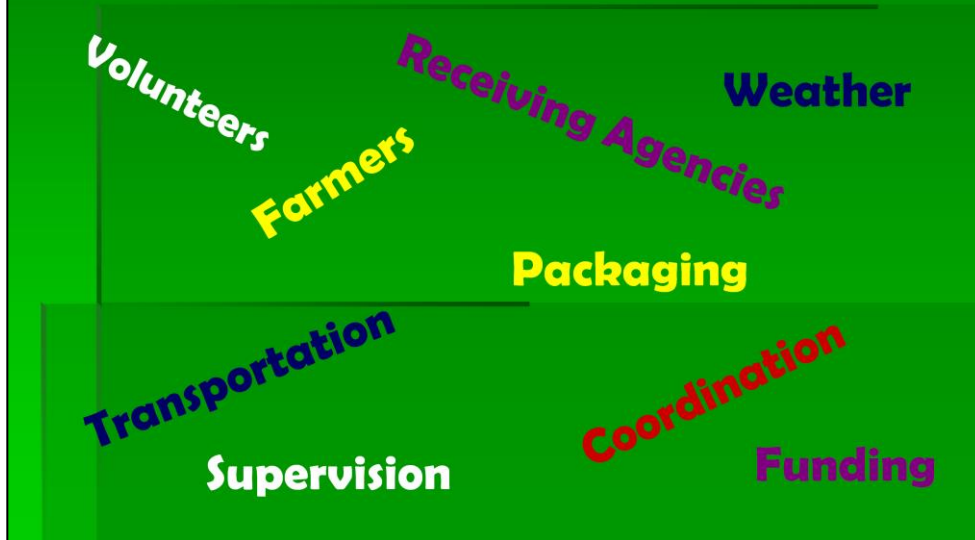


And meanwhile, while all that good, nutritious food is going to waste, as many as 50 million Americans are struggling to put food – any food – on their tables. Somebody ought to do something about it.

We came to TN in 2010.
Since then, we've placed 8.4
million lbs. of healthy fresh
food with people who need it.



Making It All Happen: Logistics & Coordination



The Society of St. Andrew bridges the gap between the food that would be wasted and our hungry brothers and sisters. We are the logistics and coordination folks who see that good food goes from farms to forks.

Our Next steps

- Regional chapters
 - increased food
 - decrease expenses
- Expand funding sources
 - current 1/3, 1/3, 1/3
- Technological support
 - Zero Percent

Now that we're established in the state, we're trying to expand our network. We are creating regional/county chapters in the hopes that relationship and regional proximity will help farmers, volunteers, and agencies rescue more food.

We're always doing fundraising. Our typical budget is made up of about 1/3 churches, 1/3 foundations, and 1/3 individual donors

We're looking into new technologies that would allow us to get the word out when there's a field to be gleaned. ZeroPercent is an app that is currently at work in Chicago. Restaurants input food that's available, and people go pick it up and deliver it to shelters or pantries. I'm just in the beginning stages of trying to get someone to create a similar app for us. Farmers could input their crop, and volunteers could go glean the produce.

Finally, the Natural Resource Defense Council is using Nashville as a prototype city to reduce food waste. They've gathered groups like Second Harvest and the Society of St. Andrew, along with composting companies, representatives from the hospitality industry, and representatives from grocery store chains into a broader conversation about food waste.

Elsewhere

- NRDC in Nashville
- Ugly Veggies
- National Geographic
- Europe

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Whole Foods has started a small line of "ugly veggies" which will be available in California as a test market. There are also subscription services available—you receive a box of "ugly veggies" every week.

National Geographic just did a huge thing on food waste, and awareness is increasing.

A few countries in Europe are making it illegal for grocery stores to throw food away, forcing them to donate it to shelters first.

Society of St. Andrew

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Please feel free to call or email me with any questions. I encourage you to “like” us on Facebook or “follow” us on Twitter and Instagram to see regular updates about our work in Tennessee and interact with us.